

One Thing Is Learned

One thing is clearly ascertained by a perusal of the Pentagon study, about the publication of which so much controversy has arisen.

That thing is the perceptive level of performance of the Central Intelligence Agency as to Indochina in the 1964-forward period in which American involvement in Vietnam was mushrooming.

✓ The CIA clearly "read" very well the indications of what might develop in Indochina as the American commitment was extended.

In specifics, the CIA rejected the domino theory — that if South Vietnam fell, there would also topple Laos, then Cambodia, then other Asian states, like a falling row of dominoes. The CIA saw only limited damage to American interests from a Red victory in South Vietnam. This still could have been a faulty conclusion but the intelligence on which it was based was sound.

Again in specifics, the CIA expected — and rightly — little impact on the war potential of North Vietnam through restricted bombing. It did not believe North Vietnam would be intimidated by the possible loss of its minuscule in-

dustrial complex — it had the Soviet Union and Red China on which to rely. Its own production was a drop in the bucket measured against the outpouring of martial and industrial aid from the Big Reds.

Most of the strategic conclusions made by the CIA were rejected by the policy makers and the rejection was ratified by action of then President Johnson. This included the CIA dissent to commitment of U.S. forces to offensive combat operations without any change in the limited tempo of bombing operations being conducted. An April, 1965, memo from the CIA director, John A. McCone, put the dissent this way: In effect if the planned ground operation goes in motion we will find ourselves mired down in combat in the jungle in a military effort that we cannot win and from which we will have extreme difficulty extricating ourselves.

✓ Hindsight being 20-20 invariably, one could wish that Mr. McCone might have been a little more persuasive with Mr. Johnson and those to whom the then president did listen.

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